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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000743

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TAGS: ECON IZ PGOV

SUBJECT: IRAQ EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE - MARCH 7

¶1. (C) Summary. In the absence of Prime Minister Maliki, the Minister of Defense Abdul Qadir (MoD) Chaired the Iraqi Executive Steering Committee (IESC) in support of the Baghdad Security Plan (FaQ). The meeting featured complaints from representatives of Sadr City about the extremely poor state of services in their area - an issue termed a national crisis by IESC members in attendance. End Summary.

Water Quality Tests Disputed

¶2. (C) The Baghdad Mayor disputed claims from last week's IESC that 90% of the city's drinking water is contaminated. The Mayor called for joint testing between the Amanat, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Health to produce a standard measure that is presented weekly to the Prime Minister. FaQ Media Chair Yaseen Majeed called for FaQ Civilian Spokesman Tahseen Sheekly to conduct a proactive public information campaign on water quality. The MoD endorsed both proposals.

¶3. (C) Comment. The endorsement of Sheekly by Majeed is unprecedented. Majeed has long felt threatened by Sheekly and has sought to minimize his role. This comment may reflect that Sheekly, a secular Sunni, has achieved increased clout after recently being named by the Prime Minister as Speaker of the IFCNR Reconciliation Committee. End Comment.

Proposed Joint Venture Trash Collection

¶4. (C) The Mayor announced that he intended to establish for profit a joint venture trash collection services with the Amanat retaining control of the to-be-formed companies. The Mayor stated that he presented the proposal to the Council of Ministers and is awaiting response. The Mayor also reported on the increased productivity of collecting trash at night. The MoD urged the Mayor to coordinate trash cleaning efforts with the BOC so that less secure areas can be cleaned. In addition, the Provincial Council noted that it is funding trash pickup through local governments and advocated using local councils as the lead on trash pickup. (Note: It is refreshing to hear the PC advocate on behalf of local government-something it has been reluctant to devolve power to in the past. End note.)

Sadr City Comes to the IESC

¶5. (C) Representatives of the Sadr City Municipality attended the IESC and gave a list of complaints about the poor state of services and infrastructure in the area. A major contributor to the problems, they explained, is the fact that Sadr City infrastructure was built in 1980 when the population was 750,000. Local District Council members and other representatives claim three million Iraqis now reside in Sadr City and that the population continues to grow rapidly as displaced Shia's relocate there. Underlying the issues were tensions over which GOI entity controls local

contracting and the prioritizing of projects, with only slight mention of Coalition Forces, detainees, and rogue militias.

¶ 16. (C) The Sadr City Representatives complained about all services, particularly education and water, and claimed that the area has been neglected by the GoI, the Amanat and the Coalition. The Representatives stated that the area has only ten kindergartens, four hospitals and 20 gas stations for three million people. They stated that the food bundles of the public distribution system no longer reached most of the city population. Moreover, they stated that not one GoI Minister or the Prime Minister has visited them and that the local councils were instead doing the job of the ministries in Sadr City. In response, the Minister of Immigration noted that he had visited his employees in Sadr City the day before.

¶ 17. (C) In response to critiques about the currently non-functioning R3 water treatment plant built by the Coalition, Ambassador Crocker acknowledged that the plant is shut down due to faulty filters, but stated that the US is committed to making it fully operational by August. Ambassador Crocker also noted that the US has spent more than \$160 million on projects in Sadr City and that work there is complicated by the frequent killings of contractors and lack of communication with influential actors on the ground.

¶ 18. (C) The Mayor, the Minister of Immigration and the Sadr City Representatives traded complaints about the mismanagement of displaced persons relocating to Sadr City and further burdening the limited infrastructure. The Mayor stated that illegal squatters occupying public lands within the Sadr City is inhibiting the delivery of new services.

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¶ 19. (C) Both the MoD and Hashim Hassani, Head of the IESC Political Committee and former Speaker of the CoR, called the situation a "national crisis" and urged for coordinated inter-ministerial action. The MoD instructed the Provincial Chair, the Mayor and the Sadr City Representatives to meet and prepare a unified study for the Council of Ministers.

¶ 110. (C) Comment. The Sadr City presentation was the first time the IESC has specifically addressed the situation of a Baghdad district or neighborhood holistically as an agenda item. While the meeting certainly highlighted issues that the GoI must address, Embassy IESC interlocutors have expressed concerns to the IESC Secretariat that repeating the discussion of services on a district-by-district basis could risk undermining the Joint Planning Committee meeting run by the Provincial Council which serves a similar purpose. Nonetheless, early indications are that the IESC now intends to regularly invite various district representatives to the forum, alternating between districts on each side of the river. End Comment.

¶ 111. (C) Comment. The meeting illustrated some of the political dynamics at play between Mayor Saber, PC Chairman Mueen, the Governor and the Sadr City representatives. Sadr City representatives claimed that they have a very close working relationship with the Essential Services Committee of the PC, but have "no idea" what the Amanat does. They complained vociferously about shoddy Amanat contractors and demanded more "realistic" projects, such as road re-pavement and school constructions, whose contracts they oversaw. The banter between provincial, city, and local officials reveal a clear alliance between the Sadr City Representatives and ISCI/Badr PC Chairman Mueen. Governor Tahan was more quiet on the issues and did not appear as closely affiliated with the Sadr City representatives. End Comment.

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